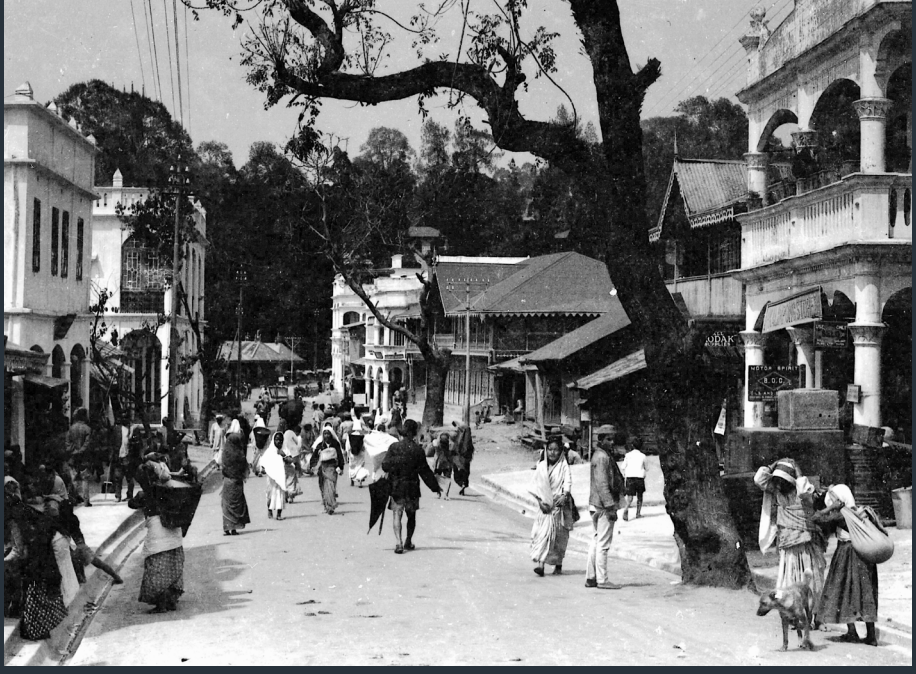

TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE HIMALAYAN BORDERLANDS

Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone"

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HEIDELBERG
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Imagining the Wild Man: Yeti Sightings in Folktales and Newspapers of the Darjeeling and Kalimpong Hills

Abstract This article aims to explore the entanglements of folktales, travel accounts, and newspaper reports involving sightings, encounters, and rumors about the existence of a legendary creature inhabiting the snowy peaks and forested slopes of the Himalayan range. Since time immemorial, the yeti complex has been part of the folklore and belief systems of diverse Himalayan communities. With the advent of colonial explorers and administrators, the notion of a mysterious creature started to haunt the imagination of the Western public at large when reports about its existence started to appear and were then widely circulated. From village rituals, myths, fables, and stories to the accounts of scholars and travelers, from the pages of local newspapers to global media, the yeti complex has proved to be a very resilient and constantly fascinating mytheme that is able to pervade different discourses, knowledge systems, religious beliefs, folklore, and pop culture.

Preamble

It was a misty early morning when I reached the house of the old Lepcha *bongthing* or ritual specialist of the village of Tingvong.[1] The old man was sitting near the fire in a small hut outside the main house. He was tending the fire and boiling water to make tea, while receiving villagers who were asking for a blessing, or healing, or relief from pain. An hour or two passed as he attended to the two or three people who visited him. The sun slowly rose, dissipating the thick mists covering the forested slopes of Dzongu.

In the midst of casual conversation, since he was in the mood to tell good stories, I asked him about the yeti. Many years before, while doing research on Lepcha shamans, I encountered this topic twice: once in a book by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who wrote that the Lepcha were famous hunters with many stories about yeti encounters, and on a second occasion while doing an interview to record an origin myth. The Lepchas' creation myth says that before the first humans were born, two progenitors gave birth to seven illegitimate sons and abandoned them in the forest. The seven brothers became *mung*s, demon-like beings who were intent on taking revenge on later-born human offspring. When I asked for the names of these seven demons, my informant was able to provide only three. Quite puzzled, I kept asking him for the names of the others until, visibly annoyed, he replied: "Listen, you Westerners keep talking about the yeti all the time, but you know nothing. At least I know three of them." The *mung* is, in fact, described and understood as a mountain demon, but that was the first time in my research that these beings were directly connected to the broader concept of a mysterious being living up into the mountains, the yeti, or the "abominable snowman."

The *bongthing* told me that in the old days there were many more *jhampey mung* roaming in the woods of Sikkim. Nowadays, only few are left. "I still remember my first meeting with the *jhampey mung*," he continued,

> I was up in the mountains with an old *bongthing* and we were on a hunting trip. When night fell we found shelter in a cave and we went to sleep. After a while, we were awakened by some scary noises and screams, and then we heard the whistling of the *jhampey mung*. There was also the sound of rolling boulders and trees being uprooted. I was so scared, but my companion prepared an offering on a banana leaf tray: some rice, some meat, some *chi*, simple things. Then he went towards the entrance of the cave and left the offerings there. The noise ceased and we finally went back to sleep. The next morning the clearing outside the cave was untouched: no uprooted trees, no displaced boulders. My friend told me that you have to worship the *jhampey mung* because he is the lord of the forest animals and the hunters. That day we caught a deer because he was happy with us.

1 Preamble by Davide Torri.

Introduction

The yeti, a creature of myth, an elusive and unknown primate of the high Himalayas and even a pop icon, emerges from the encounter of local religious beliefs, rumors, and modern media culture. The aims of this paper are to bring together at least some of the threads and strands which, woven together, created the modern mythology, the popular image, and the unsolved mystery that still roams, haunts, and stalks the solitary peaks, glaciers, and high forests of the Himalayas. For several reasons Kalimpong became one of the centers where this mythology was produced—a mythology in the construction of which Lepcha villagers from Sikkim, Tibetan monks, British Imperial officers, naturalists and zoologists, mountaineers and journalists were entangled.

It is no coincidence, then, that most sightings and myths have been collected from the Eastern Himalayan region. The region around Sikkim, between Nepal and Bhutan served as one of Western modernists' main access points to the Himalayas and the land beyond, Tibet. By the late nineteenth century, missionaries had settled in the Darjeeling hills and the whole area became a focal point for the British Raj administration. After the violent Younghusband expedition of 1903–1904 (Allen 2004), the small town of Kalimpong, situated along the newly created trade route, steadily grew in importance. In Kalimpong, various amenities of modern life, spread through colonial encounters, were available. The town quickly developed into a popular place for people with different kinds of interests and duties: British officials, Tibetan trade agents, Western trade agents, Bhutanese, and Nepalese merchants. Western missionaries and Tibetologists gained access to Tibet from Kalimpong. Mountaineers also chose Darjeeling and Kalimpong as convenient starting points for their attempts on the 8,000 meter-plus peaks.

In this regard, Kalimpong and the neighboring areas epitomize the concept of the contact zone as formulated by Pratt, an area characterized by "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (Pratt 2003, 7). This particular situation gave rise to a pattern of interaction between multiple and radically diverse narratives and discursive formations which interacted and intermingled with one another. As such, the yeti complex is the effect of a polyglossia in which local folklore meets global newspapers, where local religious specialists meet global intellectuals, and the resulting dialogue is then shared with an even larger audience. Moreover, even if this dialogue entails "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (ibid. 7), it cannot escape the asymmetrical power relations between the different aforementioned voices and especially the representations and knowledge systems involved here (Asad 1975; Said 1989).

In colonizing India, but also in exploring the Himalayan region, one important task for Western teams of experts was geographical surveying,

during which Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, was "discovered." The main access route to Mount Everest went through Kalimpong and Sikkim. "Conquering" these mountains by reaching their summits became a new, modern hobby. Others wanted to study the flora and fauna of the Himalayas—at that time an important area of research for Western academics. Although claims of scientific neutrality were made, efforts to map, catalogue, take censes of and study the flora, fauna, and even the people of the Indian subcontinent were in themselves an essential part of the practice of domination: controlling or taming the natural landscape of India was the mirror image of Western control of the political sphere of the subcontinent (Torri 2013).

It was in and as a result of this special situation, i.e., a mix of political, geographical, scientific, and mountaineering-related interests, that the yeti came into being. There were many local myths, narratives, and legends about the existence of a huge creature living on high, around the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. Building on those myths, narratives, and legends, Western modernists re-embedded them in quite different frameworks and interpreted them in their own ways.

Wild things: an introduction to the yeti complex

Wild, uncontrollable landscapes have always inspired fear in the lonely traveler, pilgrim, or hunter: mountain passes, deep forests, and jungles were in fact seen as dangerous places, where wild, non-human beings, ghosts, spirits, and deities were roaming, lurking, and stalking their prey. The ethnography of the Himalayas, which by now is quite rich, has also shown that to a certain degree beliefs cohere across a wide area, which certainly includes the Tibetan plateau and the southern slopes of the Himalayas. Such consistency stretches across cultural boundaries with similar patterns of appropriation: at its apotropaic level, the various expressions of religiosity (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) seem to be concerned with mundane afflictions and diseases, and their main supernatural agents (Ferrari 2011). The folklore related to the various yeti-like beings of the Himalayas, as we will see, can highlight some aspects of this worldview (or these worldviews), in which human beings not only share the environment with a host of non-humans, but are also embedded in a relational framework that ultimately depends on the actions and reactions of all its actors: the villagers thought meeting a yeti-like creature was an uncanny, ominous event foretelling good fortune or misfortune, or even illness and death.

Ideas and beliefs about wild, hominoid beings inhabiting untamed landscapes are in no way exclusive to the Himalayas (see Forth 2007 and 2008): from ancient Near Eastern sources (Mobley 1997) to European folklore (Bernheimer 1952; Bartra 1994), from the Iranic plateau (Marazzi 1974) to the Russian and Mongolian steppe and then down to the Chinese forests (Meldrum and Guoxing 2012) we have innumerable accounts of sightings,

rumors, legends, and folktales focusing on the "wild man." A specific, persisting set of traits and features could be assigned to the being variously known in the Himalayas as *yeti*, *jangli admi*, *chu mung*, *sogpa*, *migo*, and by other names. First of all, the English word "yeti" seems to be derived from the Sherpa expression *yeh the*, which may be a derivation from the Tibetan *g.ya' dred*[2] (Snellgrove 1957, 214). The expression seems to define a bear-like being (*dred*) that inhabits the higher Himalayas, and in Sherpa folklore at least three different types of this bear-like being are identified: 1) *drema* or *telma* (Tib. *dred mar*); 2) *chuti* (Tib. *phyugs dred*),[3] and 3) *miti* (Tib. *mi dred*) (Oppitz 1968, 138–139).

It is certainly a fact that all along the Himalayas people are able to differentiate among diverse kinds of yeti-like beings in terms of at least two broad categories: a big being and a smaller one. Although both the small being and the large one have hairy bodies, the small one is a reddish or yellowish brown while the big one is dark brown, gray, or black. Such beings are often said to emit a characteristic sound that is almost like a whistle. Humans almost invariably encounter these beings in forested areas or snowy fields, although some reports claim they can raid cultivated fields, destroy crops, or attack cattle. In some of the accounts gathered by anthropologists (e.g. Oppitz 1968), they are also known to prey on humans. In addition to these zoological traits, in many folktales and local accounts the yeti also has inverted footprints, can kidnap human beings in order to mate with them, and usually imitates human behavior. According to many informants there is also a certain degree of overlap with the forest deity held responsible for kidnapping and initiating shamans: the *ban jhankri*, "the forest shaman," is often described as a small, furry being with reversed feet who is known to act as a teacher for future shamans, imparting to them specific knowledge about the spirit world and how to deal with it (Peters 2004).

Early Western sources

The fundamental ambiguity of the yeti lies in the realms of perception and the approach taken. Ape or ghost? Bear or deity? If we look carefully, we find that traits characteristic of these beings were already present in the earliest Western sources. In his paper "On the Mammalia of Nepal," while recording the absence of apes in the high Himalayas, Brian H. Hodgson reports in a footnote that:

> My shooters were once alarmed, in the Kachár, by the apparition of a "wild man," possibly an ourang, but I doubt their accuracy. They mistook the creature for a cacodemon or rakshasa, and fled from it

2 In this paper, we use the extended Wylie transliteration system for Tibetan.
3 In the transliteration system of Oppitz given as *p'yugs dred*.

> instead of shooting it. It moved, they said, erectly: was covered with long, dark hair, and had no tail (Hodgson 1832, 339).

This is probably the oldest record in Western sources of the presence (?) of a furry, hominoid being roaming the ridges and high valleys of the Himalayan range, soon to become famous as the abominable snowman. Hodgson's report highlights the great divide between local and Western/modernist interpretations, prevalent apparently since the very beginning of scientific interest in the yeti. While for Hodgson the "wild man" might be an ape, for the local hunters it is a supernatural being (*rakshasa*), a claim pertaining to that sphere of belief in which folklore, mythology, and reality merge into a unified dimension: not an animal, not a human being, possibly a lesser deity, perhaps a local spirit, surely a creature of the wilds.

The same features of the Hodgson report also appear in a later document, a letter read during the April 27, 1915 meeting of the Zoological Society of London and preserved in the Society's proceedings. Mr. Henry J. Elwes read aloud an extract from a letter he received from Mr. J. R. P. Gent, Forest Officer of the Darjeeling Division, "on the possible existence of a large ape, unknown to science, in Sikkim":

> I have discovered the existence of another animal but cannot make out what it is, a big monkey or ape perhaps—if there were any apes in India. It is a beast of very high elevations and only gets down to Phalut in the cold weather. It is covered with longish hair, face also hairy, the ordinary yellowish brown colour of the Bengal monkey. Stands about 4 feet high and goes about on the ground chiefly, though I think it can also climb. The peculiar feature is that its tracks are about eighteen inches or two feet long and the toes point in the opposite direction to that in which the animal is moving. [...] He is known as the jungli admi or sogpa. One was worrying a lot of coolies working in the forest below Phalut in December, they were very frightened and would not go into work. [...] An old choukidar of Phalut told me he had frequently seen them in the snow there, and confirmed the description of the tracks (Elwes 1915, 294).

It is worth noting that this document also reports two indigenous expressions used to indicate the being, *jangli admi* (Nep. forest-man) and *sogpa* (Tib. ?).[4] Chronologically, between these two reports we find the famous Major Waddell episode, which involved sightings of large footprints at a high altitude in northeastern Sikkim. When the people accompanying him identified the footprints as those made by a yeti, Waddell became very curious and did some research on the topic, soon reaching the conclusion that, despite widespread belief, all the evidence he was able to gather

4 The term was reported by many informants and seems to be used mainly by minorities in eastern Nepal.

actually relied on rumors, and that the "hairy wild men are evidently the great yellow snow bears (*Ursus isabellinus*)" (Waddell 1900, 223).

In 1936, British journalist Henry Newman seems instead to have placed the yeti entirely in the religious sphere:

> In 1936 a new kind of ghost or spirit appeared in India and caused the greatest excitement in the country. This spirit was eighteen feet or more high, and it left footprints several feet long which cut into the earth two or three inches. This giant was first seen in Sikhim. He then came down the hill to Jalpaiguri; next, he wandered all over Northern Bengal; and when I last heard of him he had been even seen in Cochin, still leaving enormous footprints. It was said that those who saw him died on the spot. And yet he was not an evil spirit; he was a good spirit; so good indeed that the sight of him was too much for the ordinary sinner; but if his presence was to be avoided, the footprints were very useful things to see. The sight of them cured all maladies. In fact, even a sketch of the footprints healed the sick. I doubt not that in due course the places where the footprints are alleged to exist will have shrines built over them (Newman 1937, 159–160).

His view is probably more in line with emic perspectives than any other Western sources are, and he even highlights the effects of the yeti's alleged presence in daily ritual healing practices. Newman is further credited with coining the expression "abominable snowman" in 1921. This term was widely used in later media coverage of the yeti.[5]

Yeti encounters in local knowledge systems and beliefs

Long before the yeti made its appearance in the published memoirs, reports, and travelogues of British officers, naturalists, and journalists, it was a well-known figure in the myths, legends, folklore, and folktales of several communities living in the Himalayas. In this essay, for practical reasons, we are dealing with a limited set of sources: those related to the area on which we are focused (Kalimpong and the wider Darjeeling hills area, Sikkim, and Bhutan).

5 After the 1921 Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, Newman was able to interview participants in Darjeeling. Due to his mistranslation of indigenous words, he ended up creating the most popular definition for the being that supposedly inhabits the higher Himalayas. No doubt the word "abominable" helped fire the imagination of Western readers: "The name 'abominable snowman' came into use when the *Times* journalist Henry Newman gave it as the translation of the name meteh-kangmi, as sent back by Colonel Howard-Bury in his account of the expedition's experience on the pass" (Jackson 1999, 71).

Lepcha folklore

The link between the yeti and a similar figure that appeared among the Lepchas was noted by Nebesky-Wojkowitz in 1957:

> The most curious figure in the Lepcha pantheon is Chu Mung, the "Glacier Spirit," an apelike creature. This is no other than the mysterious Yeti, or "Snowman," of the Sherpas and Tibetans. The Lepchas worship the Glacier Spirit as the god of hunting and lord of all forest beasts. Appropriate offerings have to be made to him before and after the chase, and many Lepcha hunters claim to have met the Glacier Spirit during expeditions on the edge of the moraine fields (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1957, 136).

As a member of the Third Danish Expedition in Central Asia, Danish anthropologist Halfdan Siiger had the opportunity to make an extensive study of the Lepcha or Rong communities of Kalimpong and Dzongu (Siiger 1956 and 1967). In 1978, he published a remarkable paper titled "The 'Abominable Snowman': Himalayan religion and folklore from the Lepchas of Sikkim," in which he compared his findings with those that had already emerged in Nebesky-Wojkowitz's work (1956a, 1956b, and 1957). According to Siiger, what is known at large as the yeti or by a variety of other expressions identified by Nebesky-Wojkowitz, including *mi rgod*, *gangs mi*, *mi chen po*, *mi bon po*, or *mi shon po* (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956b, 344 and 1957, 155), corresponds to the being known to the Lepchas as *chu mung* or *lho mung* (Siiger 1978, 424). Despite the fact that in Lepcha mythology the *mung* are considered dangerous and demonic creatures (whereas the *rum* belong to a more benevolent class of deities), we are told by Siiger that the *chu mung* is simultaneously also the *dju thing*, the lord (Lep. *thing*) of the hunt (Lep. *dju*), and as such venerated as *pong rum*, the god of hunters. In a series of tales collected by Siiger, it seems that the definitive behavioral shift from hunting deity to dangerous supernatural being attributed to the *chu mung* was ascribed to the behavior of Lepcha hunters: with the decline in hunting activities and the rise in alternative forms of their economy, rituals for the *pong rum* were also neglected. For these reasons, Siiger states, hunters venture into the forest knowing that they suddenly might meet the enraged lord of the animals, who is ready to retaliate. Recurring features of their tales include being pursued, pelted with stones and boulders, having trees fall on them, and shivering and shaking in terror upon hearing the eerie whistle of the *mung* (Siiger 1978, 427), as M. Lepcha was told during a recent interview with a *bongthing*:

> It's up there. [...] If you come across a female one, you are lucky. A male could kill you! Seeing a female Jhampey Mung means that you will never return empty handed from your hunt. They whistle and that's how you know it's them. They could be this tall [suggests

> a height of around 3.5 feet with his hand] and have red hair. They have red hair and look like us. [...] They are appeased by an offering of ginger, dried bird and fish. The males can be violent and throw big stones around your shed. You hear a whistle near you and in a moment you start hearing whistles from all the mountains around you. They are the mountain deities and we must appease them. They are our Great Spirit Guides in the mountains (Lepcha 2013).

Bhutanese folklore

A character that frequently appears in Bhutanese folklore is the *migoi* (from Tibetan *mi rgod*), a magical creature of the wilds that is simultaneously a supernatural being and a bogeyman invoked to scare children. It shares several of the characteristics already attributed to the yeti-like being in the Eastern Himalayas and has some additional traits: it can become invisible at will, its blood has magic qualities, and can be used to create talismans, amulets, and magic weapons (Choden 1997).

In Bhutanese sources two different kinds of yeti-like beings are also found: the *mechume*, also known as *mirgola*, which was usually described as a small, hominoid, ape-like being with long arms and brownish or reddish hair who inhabits the deep, forested slopes of the Himalayas, and the *migoi* or *gredpo*, who usually stalks the high pastures where the herders bring their yaks. The *migoi* is described as a huge being with reddish-brown or grayish-black hair (Choden 1997, ix–x). In certain tales the *migoi* is said to have a hollow back. This detail is quite interesting since, like the description of the reversed feet reported in other contexts, it seems to point toward the world of the dead: in India and Nepal, reversed feet and a hollow back are features commonly associated with very aggressive and dangerous ghosts. In Bhutanese folklore, the being also possesses some magical items: the *dipshing*, a kind of charm in the form of a juniper twig, which gives the holder the power to become invisible at will, and the *sem phatsa*, a small satchel without which the *migoi* becomes helpless and loses all its powers (Choden 1997, x).

Sikkimese folklore

Among the Lhopo villagers of Tingchim, as reported by Balicki in her book documenting the religious life of Tingchim, the yeti is equated with the spirits of mountain passes, the *latsen*:

> The *latsen* is one of the most important and versatile class of supernatural being in Tingchim. [...] the *latsen* are usually heard or smelled rather than seen. They are well-known for helping practitioners with logistics during the isolation of their meditation retreats by

> presenting firewood and meat at their doorstep, and may be protectors of women in the village. Although helpful, the *latsen* are also thought to be at the root of many cases of illness in the village (Balicki 2008, 105).

Moreover, Sikkim is considered to be a "hidden land" (Tib. *sbas yul*), a secret and sacred place, blessed by Guru Padmasambhava and filled with relics, treasures, and medicinal herbs. In a text explaining the wondrous nature of the environment and the auspicious qualities of the landscape, it is said that:

> Whenever the mountains, rocky hills, lakes and small streams of such a sacred land are polluted, its native guardian spirits and local deities will become agitated. When mdZod lnga becomes agitated, there will be harm from a tiger. When it is Thang lha, there will be harm from the yeti (*mi rgod*). When bdud becomes restless, there will be harm from a wild bear. The nagas will send harm by a poisonous snake, btsan will cause harm through a wolf or a wild dog. In short, whenever the native guardian spirits and local deities are not honoured, rain will not come on time human and animal diseases will occur as well as internal unrest, causing all kinds of hardship and suffering (Dokhampa 2003, 85).

Sherpa folklore

The origin of the word yeti should be ascribed to the Sherpas who used the term before it became known around the world. In 1997, Sherpa and Peirce published an account of one encounter between the informant's father and a yeti. The story is worth quoting at length since it retains all the freshness and immediacy of spoken language:

> At that time, my father went to cut grass on a hill. From Orsho, you walk down, down, down—and cross the river from Thamo. Then up the hill and go to cut the grass. He had a basket—a big basket—and he took some kind of sharp hook that they have for cutting grass. It was then the middle of the day. Then he smelled a very, very bad smell—VERY bad smell. He sniffed again, and this time, it's a very bad smell. And he's walking up the mountain and looking and he's saying, "What is going on here?" He is just looking everywhere, and then he sees the yeti. The yeti is going up then. And then he came down. But my father saw him first. The yeti was sitting on a rock. He was quite close from here to down there—you see that small tree? That much far, I think. Yetis aren't so big. They are about the size of seven-year-old people. But yetis are VERY strong. I have never seen one. My father has told me about them. This one is sitting on a rock up on the mountain. He isn't walking, just sitting there on the rock.

> My father saw him before he saw my father. If the yeti had seen my father first, my father wouldn't have been able to walk. The yeti can make people so they can't walk. Then he eats them. But this time my father saw the yeti FIRST. He didn't bother about picking up his basket or his robe or that hook—the sharp hook. He just started running, running, running (Sherpa and Peirce 1997, 42).

By now, the reader will be able to discern some of the distinctive traits that appear in this account and show a certain continuity with the previous material. The encounter is a dangerous one, since the being has some power: if he sees you first, you cannot move, and then he will eat you. The yeti is also smelled before actually being seen.

In his book about the Sherpa of Khumbu Himal, Oppitz describes at least three different kinds of yeti: 1) *drema* or *telma* (Tib. *dred mar*); *chuti* (Tib. *phyugs dred*); and 3) *miti* (Tib. *mi dred*). According to the oral material he gathered, the *drema* or *telma* has red, gray, or black fur; about the same size as monkeys, they seem to live in groups. Seeing them is considered a bad omen, and their cries are a sure sign of disaster: their call is reputed to bring misfortune, disease, or a death in the family (Oppitz 1968, 138). The *chuti* are described as bear-sized creatures covered in black, gray, or dark red hair. They usually walk on all fours and prey on cattle: they are known as killers of sheep, goats, and yaks (Oppitz 1968, 138). The *miti* seems to be the size of a man with a reddish or light blond fur, a pointed head, and hair falling over its face. It walks upright, and is known to kidnap humans (Oppitz 1968, 139).

From folklore to newspapers

A few days before Christmas 1951, Prince Peter of Greece sent a letter to the Calcutta *Statesman* (Izzard 1955, 198–201; Kirtley 1963, 318). He described some peculiar events that took place in a village close to Jalap La, in Sikkim. Having noticed that a yeti was frequently coming to drink water from their trough, the villagers filled it with *chang*—the local rice beer—instead of water. They were thus able to capture the drunken being and, after firmly tying it up, they headed down south, intending to bring it to Kalimpong to exhibit it. But their plans changed abruptly when the yeti, sober again, was able to break the ropes and escape along the way. According to Prince Peter, the being was a monkey, and it might have provided some clues that would help answer puzzling questions posed by the famous and mysterious footprints found and photographed by Shipton during his 1951 Everest Expedition.

Kalimpong newspapers: *Himalayan Times* and *Melong*

With time, Kalimpong, already a trading hub,[6] also became a local media center. Picking up on the strong tradition of newspaper (and book) production in Western Bengal (Offredi 1971 and 1992; Schneider 2005; Stark 2007), and encouraged by the significant number of Europeans who had settled in the pleasant climate of the Eastern Himalayas, modern newspapers in various languages were published in Kalimpong.[7] Many printing presses for different scripts were available in Kalimpong and in the nearby town of Darjeeling. Because these are easily accessible sources, two newspapers, the *Himalayan Times* (hereafter HT; 1947–1963) and the *Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long* (hereafter: *Melong*; 1925–1963), will be the basis of the following analysis.

The founder and editor of the *Himalayan Times* was Suresh Chandra Jain (1911–1956). The newspaper was written in English and published weekly from 1947 on. Issues consisted of between eight and twenty pages. Its first eight issues contained an average of twelve pages, and in its final eight years it consisted of an average of eight pages. The circulation fluctuated between 1300 and 2000 copies and it was circulated throughout the district of Darjeeling, although most of the copies were of course sold were in Kalimpong.[8] It belonged to the tradition of the English-language press of West Bengal in terms of both content and format. It contained both news and feature articles, including an appreciable number of (semi-) scientific essays. Many of its guest authors were renowned Western scholars who spent time in Kalimpong in order to study Himalayan cultures, such as the aforementioned Austrian anthropologist René Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the British Tibetologist George Patterson, and the British official and Tibetophile Hugh Richardson, or scholars from the subcontinent who had studied in the West. The paper's target audience was native English speakers and non-native speakers with an excellent command of the language. A British-style modernism went with the language. In general the paper reiterated "Western" modernist narratives that were disseminated through flows of information controlled by the British[9] or spread by the above-mentioned foreign scholars.

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6 On products traded in Kalimpong, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956. On the trade route between Kalimpong and Lhasa, see Harris 2013. On the role of Marwari merchants in Kalimpong, see also Majumder 2005.

7 A comprehensive overview of newspapers and journals produced in Kalimpong has yet to be compiled, but some titles are: *Ādarśa* (Nepali), *Chandrika* (Nepali), *Himalayan Times* (English), *The Young Lepcha* (Lepcha), or *Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long* (Tibetan). For a general overview of Tibetan-language newspapers, see Erhard 2015 or Zla ba tshe ring 2009

8 Information on the editor and circulation figures were provided by Sandip Jain, the editor's grandson, who publishes a continuation of the *Himalayan Times* today in Kalimpong.

9 A global telegraphic network had been set up by the British Empire: See Wenzlhuemer 2010 and Kaul 2006.

Reiterations of colonial jargon and knowledge can be found in the second newspaper, the *Melong*, but to a much lesser degree. Translating the news and essays into Tibetan entailed a considerable transformation of their contents. The paper's full title can be translated as "A Mirror of News from Various Regions [of the World]." The *Melong* was addressed to an audience living outside British-controlled areas, and was stylistically adapted to what the editor and the authors considered Tibetan needs. While it was distributed worldwide, the main target audience was people in central Tibet. Its circulation numbers varied from one hundred to up to almost two thousand copies, while on average five hundred copies were distributed. In Lhasa, the newspaper found an illustrious circle of elite readers from the Dalai Lama downwards.[10]

The *Melong* was the first newspaper produced by somebody who considered himself Tibetan, Dorje Tharchin (1890–1976), also known as Tharchin Babu.[11] He learned about newspapers through his Christian upbringing at the Moravian mission, which produced the first Tibetan-language newspaper. His newspaper was thus modeled along the lines of contemporary newspapers in Europe, but Tharchin made some changes in order to adapt the paper to a local context.[12]

As the history of both newspapers shows, at first glance newspapers were colonial products which deliberately used a modern model. Sometimes, however, the producers of these newspapers deviated from the model and reinterpreted form and content quite a lot. Building on Pratt, one could describe these local newspapers as "auto-ethnographies," i.e., textual products emerging from and through the power asymmetries of contact zones, which respond to the colonizer's input in ways that deviate from the metropolitan model: "If ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), auto-ethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts. [... They] involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms" (Pratt 1991, 35). As we shall see, both papers reinforced what Westerners imagined about the yeti. However, there was a stark imbalance between the *Himalayan Times*' coverage and the *Melong*'s: twenty-three articles about the yeti in the former and only two in the latter.[13]

10 For details on the production history of the *Melong*, see Sawerthal 2011, 76ff.

11 Tharchin was born in Khunu, at the border to Tibet, and thus he was Indian in terms of citizenship. For details on his life, see Fader 2002–2009.

12 For more about the *Melong*, see e.g. Engelhardt 2011 and 2012, Hackett 2008, or Sawerthal 2011.

13 For a list of articles we studied, see the tables in the appendix. Methodologically speaking, the selection of articles is different in each newspaper. The contents of the HT are available through a complete, searchable digital archive (OCR), while the *Melong* is only available in image-data or hard copy comprising more than 2500 pages. Therefore, it was easy to search for keywords such as "yeti" or

The yeti was hyped in the Western mass media (and beyond) in the first half of the 1950s. Even before that, stories about the yeti occasionally appeared in Western newspapers. However, the first successful ascent of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, made by Edmund Hillary and Tenzin Norgay, climbing under the British flag, awed climbers and a global public and filled them with pride—but also created a vacuum. The legends and stories about a yeti circulating in the area and discussed by some Westerners proved to be fitting material to fill it. The way this unfolded can be followed in the HT.

The yeti in the *Himalayan Times*

Before 1953 the yeti was only mentioned twice in the HT. The yeti's first appearance in the newspaper was in April 1951, when the HT reported on the Dalai Lama's interactions with locals on his trip to the Sikkimese border ("Dalai Lama meets People on Mountain Walk"). He visited the main monastery of the region, the Dungkar Monastery of the late Dromo Geshe Rinpoche (*Gro mo dge bshes rin po che*):

> The Dalai Lama has still to visit a special cave where Geshe Rimpoche once meditated and where Chumbi valley people believe that the Nigyur[14] or Snowman fed the Geshe Rimpoche (HT April 29, 1951, 5).

This account anchors the yeti, as it was later called, in a local cosmography in which there is no clear-cut line between what is real or unreal in terms of the standards of modern (Western) natural sciences. Here a very accomplished master of Buddhism encounters the yeti while meditating. However, the Snowman is not at center stage, but is mentioned only in passing. The newspaper story has some resonance with Tibetan literature, in which there are several examples of encounters between ascetics and snowmen. Milarepa even described them as his companions during his life of austerity in the mountains, if we accept that the expression he uses (*mi dred*) does not refer to an actual bear, but to the hybrid creature we are examining here.[15] Stories about a friendly yeti that supports the practice of

"snowman" in the HT, but not in the *Melong*. I [Anna Sawerthal] have studied the *Melong* for over four years, going through the whole run of the newspaper many times. The two instances in which the yeti was the subject of articles were found independently of knowledge of the articles about the yeti in the HT. However, in order to counteract the methodological imbalance, I specifically looked for occurrences of the "yeti" (*i ti* or *gangs mi* or *mi rgod*) in all issues of the *Melong* published simultaneously with the discussion of the yeti in the HT.

14 We cannot trace the term "Nigyur" to a meaningful Tibetan term.

15 Hoffman (1950, 96) translates the three animals that Milarepa said were his companions as simply "ape," "monkey," and "bear." In 1972, intervening in yeti-mania, Austrian mountaineer Aufschneiter supported this view and explained yeti sightings by the habit of the *ursus isabellinus* "of rising from time to time to an upright position standing to scan the surroundings" (Aufschnaiter 1972, 116).

hermits appear also in the life stories of the seventeenth-century Sherpa Lama Sangwa Dorje (Capper 2012, 79; Wangmo 2008, 124).

A later article (February 1952, "Abominable Snowman") has a different context. Nebesky-Wojkowitz analyzes the legends scientifically: What is the origin of these legends? What is the truth behind them? He tries to trace mountaineer Eric Shipton's discovery of strange footprints (in 1951) to the creature's possible origins:

> My Tibetan informants claim that the "snowman" of European mountaineers is probably identical with an animal which is known to the Tibetans, living in the Indo-Tibetan borderland, under the name Mi go (spelled *mi rgod* in Tibetan) (HT February 3, 1952, 2).

In a sober tone he presents his collected findings, which are based on the words of his Tibetan informant:[16]

> The Mi go when standing erect, is about 7–8 feet tall. He is strong-bodied, covered with dark-brown hair, with an egg-shaped head and a red-brown monkey face, which is hairless, except for long streaks of hair on the sides. Outside the forest, the Mi go walks on the hind legs, slightly bent forward, in a peculiar slow trot. [...] The Mi go is said to be rather longlived, some of the Tibetan informants even claiming, that he might live up to two hundred years (HT February 3, 1952, 2).

Nebesky-Wojkowitz addresses the yeti's double existence in both its real and its fabulous dimensions: "Apart from accounts of encounters with a Mi go, to which a certain amount of truth can be accredited, the Mi go is as well the [sic] centre of many more or less fantastic narratives." The Lepchas are said to "worship him as the 'spirit of the hunt,' and regard him as the master and protector of all animals, who live in the mountain-forests" (HT February 3, 1952, 6). After discussing etymological details about different terms used for the creature (such as Tibetan *gangs mi*, *mi rgod*, or Lepcha *chu mung*), he mentions that the creature is said to abduct human beings:

> Numerous legends are told also about the "man-bear", who is believed to carry off sometimes a man or woman, keeping his victim in an unaccessible [sic] cave, the prisoner being mostly able to escape only after many years of captivity (HT February 3, 1952, 6).

16 It is worth noting that this type of approach, which is objectively closer to emic perspectives, could be identified with what Pratt defines as "anti-conquest" (Pratt 2007, 7), i.e. the dispassionate and pretentiously neutral gaze of the specialist, which nonetheless confirms Western epistemological hegemony.

He marks these clearly as local myths and narratives. In the same issue of HT, though, an anonymous author picks up on the legends and produces what in modern terms is known as scandalous, emotional news with a headline of "'Snowman' Monster Wandering in Himalayas? Tibetan Warns Everest Explorers." The article recounts the warnings of various Tibetan lamas that mountaineers should not go to Everest, because a race of wild men is said to live there:

> [They] have their feet turned backward to enable them to climb easily. Their hair is so long that when they go downhill it falls over their eyes. They eat yaks, the buffaloes of Tibet – AND MEN (HT February 3, 1952, 7, capitalization in original).

And, in a dramatic *crescendo* of scary details, the article concludes:

> So strongly do they believe in the hairy monster that flounders along the icy wilderness of the highest mountains in the world that the Tibetans recount, round their smoky yak-dung fires, the detailed legends of the life of the Abominable Snowman. They say the female is larger and more savage than the male. In hushed, lilting voices, they tell how the Snow-woman woos her mate and kills him if he refuses. And sometimes she kills him if he does not refuse. That is the legend of the Tibetan peasants (HT February 3, 1952, 9).

While Nebesky-Wojkowitz was careful to differentiate between legends and real encounters, trying to locate possible explanations for yeti legends in human interactions with the natural world, this article embraces local rumors and tales that are grounded in particular cosmological and folkloric ideas, embedding them in the format of a modern newspaper: "What evidence is there that the monster exists?" and "What was the truth to their warnings?" (HT February 3, 1952, 7). In 1953, the British newspaper the *Daily Mail* sent the first yeti-expedition to the Eastern Himalayas, equipped with scientists and technicians to investigate the case scientifically but in ways a general newspaper audience could understand: Is there a Snow monster in the Himalayas?[17] In short, a modern news story was born.

17 Reported in HT December 13, 1953: "'Abominable snowman.' The Daily Mail London, announced on December 3 that it was sending an expedition into the snowy wastes of Everest to try to track down the 'Abominable Snowman.' The Daily Mail said the attempt to solve 'the great mystery of the Himalayas' would be carried out by a team of leading explorers, scientists and technicians."

Additional legends and descriptions

In the following years, the HT reported on what the yeti might look like, and on the legends and stories of encounters with the creature that were circulating. One after the other, various Western expeditions arrived in the region to find the yeti. At the same time, many travelers who came for other reasons commented on the yeti, which attests to the fact that as the years went by the yeti became an ever more popular and urgent topic. In a long article about "The Sherpas" that appeared in 1954, Welsh author Showell Styles described them as staunch and enduring. "One thing alone daunts them," Styles asserted, "the suspected presence of a yeti, or Abominable Snowman":

> The only time I saw Da Norbu and Kami look dismayed was when we came upon a trail of those huge and mysteries footprints crossing a snowslope at 14,000 feet. I don't think they slept that night for it is well known that the yeti can drag a man from his tent without waking him, and then bite off his head. Does the Abominable Snowman exist? Any Sherpa will answer "Yes"! (HT January 6, 1957, 10).

In February 1959, a certain Brijesh K. Verma wrote an extensive article (HT February 8 1959 and HT February 15 1959) in which he explained details about the yeti and, trying to prove its existence, gave various accounts of yeti sightings. The article is a reprint from the English-language *Sunday Standard*.[18] Verma informed the readers that, "the skins and skulls of yetis are used by some Tibetan monks in certain religious ceremonies. The remains of yetis in their possession might have been examined by some Russian or Chinese scientists, but no scientific report is available." He added additional details: "Several snowmen have been reported to be killed by the Chinese, three by border guards on the Mongolian frontier during war, and one by some Gujars of Gaomerg, but no reliable description of the corpse is available anywhere."

Trying to understand what the yeti really was, Verma discusses the physiognomy of apes and humans in great detail: "Perhaps the snowman that exists even today is the same type of creature but at present we can form nothing better than a rough picture of this 'man' based on the existing reports about him." Even though there is no picture available and the sightings he recounts mention "dim light," the article gives a clear account of the being's looks, behavior, and tastes: "He communicates by means of unintelligible shrill squeaks." It is described as either gray, black, or white-haired. A female yeti reportedly once carried off a man, kept him for several years, and had children with him. "When somehow he returned to his village, she again came to take him off." In another narrative, a woman

18 This paper was founded in 1936 in Bombay by N. J. Hamilton (https://wearethebest.wordpress.com/tag/the-sunday-standard, accessed November 5, 2015).

was kidnapped, and villagers had to kill the yeti. In Cambodia, a "creature 9 ft. high, accompanied by a woman nearly 7 ft. high" was seen. Tenzin Norgay's father is also said to have seen the snowman. There is only one reason why no explorer has seen the snowman: "In saving himself from the clutches of explorers he behaves as a very cunning fellow" (HT February 8, 1959, 6–8 and February 15, 1959, 6–7).

Thus forewarned, explorers adjusted their activities to the yeti's apparent trademarks. As an article that appeared on September 27, 1959 reported about Peter Byrne and the members of his expedition:

> They would not carry any tents, but sleep in yak huts and caves for purposes of camouflage. They would wear special white clothes which would be imperceptible in the snow. These precautions are necessary to induce the yeti, a shy animal, to reveal itself (HT September 27, 1959, 7).

Interest from foreigners

Even though the HT was a local newspaper, news about the yeti and the interest it generated transcended the local dimension: out of twenty-two articles, ten clearly came from foreign news sources. Three were written by educated, Western authors, and many of the rest might also have come from foreign sources. For example, a report from Geneva reprinted in the HT in December 1955 states: "Abominable Snowman in the Alps too? Huge foot prints, similar to those found in the Himalaya have been discovered in the Swiss Alps, as well" (HT December 25, 1955, 3). Most reports were written by foreign travelers in the region, Western-educated scientists, or London correspondent Roy Choudhari.[19] The search for the yeti was apparently a hot topic in London, while not necessarily in the Himalayas. Some of Choudhari's reports bring to light global political entanglements that played out around the yeti. On May 12, 1957 he wrote:

> Russia's accusation of American espionage in Nepal-Tibetan border in the guise of snowman expeditions in the Himalayas has come as a surprise to us all. [...] The Russian government newspaper "Izvestia"[20] presumably was alluding to the Expedition led by Tom Slick of Texas sponsored by the San Antonio Zoological Society to try to determine whether the "abominable snowman" of the Himalayas is an ape or a man, or possibly a myth (HT May 12, 1957, 5).

19 See HT April 26, 1956, May 12, 1957, October 25 1959, July 10, 1960, August 15, 1960, August 21, 1960, October 16, 1960, November 13, 1960, and December 11, 1960. Choudhari's name is spelled in several different ways in the HT.

20 *Izvestiia* was one of the most widely read newspapers in the Soviet Union from 1917 to its dissolution in 1991.

In the new Cold War climate, and amidst the Sino-Tibetan conflict, Kalimpong came to be known during the 1950s as a "nest of spies" (as was reported on many occasions in both the HT and the *Melong*). Tom Slick was indeed cooperating with the CIA (Coleman 2002, 180ff.), even though it is impossible to say what his connections were with the yeti expeditions. Choudhari reported similar accusations about Sir Edmund Hillary on October 16, 1960. Global politics surfaced in the local media, and yeti expeditions became part of a renewed *great game* (Kipling 1901; Hopkirk 1982 and 1990), as the intricacies of diplomacy and espionage in this part of the world were termed. About half a year later, in June 1957, "New Rules for Yeti Expeditions" were printed, drafted by the Nepalese government and specifically aimed at the Slick expedition. With yeti-mania on the rise, the Nepalese government tried to gain control over yeti sightings: Those leading yeti expeditions were made to pay even higher fees than those paid by the Everest expeditions. Moreover, everything found in connection with the yeti, body parts or photos, had to be handed over to the government. The yeti hunt was thus not only a convenient source of income for the Nepalese government but also a strategic one: it was an effort to gain control over the flow of information going into and out of the country, information that was disseminated in the mass media as well as information that was relevant for intelligence agencies.

Ironically, no further evidence of the yeti had been found yet. This changed in 1960, when Sir Edmund Hillary could finally present Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, then King of Nepal, with what was presumed to be the yeti's scalp, which he found in a monastery in Khumbu. The HT wrote:

> Sir Edmund Hillary, obeying special Royal command, showed the yeti scalp he has borrowed from Khumjung to King Mahendra this evening in the intimate Audience Chamber of his Narainhitti Palace. [...] The King showed more than a passing interest in this most extraordinary object ever put before a king (HT December 11, 1960, 1).

Not long afterward, Hillary openly doubted the yeti's existence. While the search was still going on, local actors in the Himalayas mostly ignored it or, if they engaged with it, they often did so in a satirical tone. In September 1957, in an article criticizing the dilapidated state of a neglected village in the Kalimpong district, an author named "Moosa," wrote that only a missionary would willingly go there, intent on conversion:

> And, now that Mt. Everest has been conquered missionaries will probably be there trying to find and convert the Abominable Snowman (HT September 29, 1957, 7).

The last news item about the yeti in the HT was in S. C. Chatterjee's April 1962 account of his trip to Bhutan:

> My greatest thrill having to do with animals came later in the chief monastery where I saw a skin of the abominal [sic] snowman. As a royal guest I asked the pelts [sic] as a present, and the monk who knew nothing of the Western expedition for the mysterious yeti readily acceded to my request. I showed the skin last year to an authority in the British Museum and was identified as that of a blue bear (HT April 8 1962, 6).

The possibility of encountering the yeti was "the greatest thrill" for the traveler. The monk, on the other hand, did not even know anything about the yeti quest. Likewise, many locals who supplied material for the story of the yeti, whether as tales or objects, did not care much about taking the search any further. The question of whether the yeti truly existed according to scientific standards did not arise for most of them as it did for foreigners.

The yeti in the *Melong*

This lack of local interest is also reflected in the Tibetan newspaper *Melong*, where news about the yeti only appears twice, and then only in relation to reports on foreign expeditions searching for the yeti. On the other hand, the quest for Everest and its interpretations by Westerners were extensively reported on in the *Melong*.[21] In contrast to many newspapers in the West, the focus of attention was not on Sir Edmund Hillary, but on the Sherpa Tenzin Norgay who was made into a National Tibetan hero. At first glance, it is surprising that only two articles deal with the search for the yeti and that both articles more or less reiterate mainstream news coverage. Nonetheless, it is relevant to have a look at these news items, which are fully translated for the first time here. The first article was published in the January 1954 issue and it covers the aforementioned first yeti expedition, the one carried out by the *Daily Mail* (1953) at the beginning of yeti mania:

> Snow man (*gangs kyi mi*)
>
> In the high snow mountains [of] the Himalayan Range, there probably exists a snow man (*gangs kyi mi*). Before, snow mountain climbers saw [his/its] foot prints. Therefore, soon, a group from Europe will come through Nepal in order to search for the snow man. [Who knows] whether the snow man (*gangs mi*) exists or not. In any case, legend [has it] that there is a white snow lioness (*seng dkar mo*) in the high snow mountains of Tibet.[22]

21 From 1929 on, at least thirty-eight articles on this topic can be found.

22 Melong 21-10-3: "*gangs kyi mi/_hi ma la ya'i ri brgyud gangs ri mtho por gangs kyi mi yod tshod/_sngon du gangs ri la 'dzegs mkhan rnams kyis rkang rjes mthong ba red/_der brten ring min yo rob nas cho khag gcig bal yul brgyud gangs mi 'tshol ched*

While maintaining an air of doubt, the author made one creative interpolation to suggest a possible connection to Tibetan legends (*gtam rgyud*). In terms of the existence of mythical beings, it draws attention to another being that is roaming the snowy mountains, the white snow lioness. The second article appeared in the November/December 1960 issue and presented the same report that appeared in the corresponding issue of the HT (December 1960).

> The scalp of the Yeti or Snow Man
>
> The Sherpa Mr. Tenzin and Mr. Hillary, nowadays Sir Hillary, who climbed the top of the highest mountain of the world, called Jomolangma,[23] in 1954, recently went through Nepal to discover a creature called yeti (*i ti*) which is supposed to exist amidst the snow mountains. And even though they did not find such a creature, they saw somebody who said that in one monastery there is a skull of the yeti (*i ti*). In order to confirm this using the methods of modern science the monastery gave [the skull] as a temporary loan, so that American, British, and French scholars can analyze [the skull]. It arrived via airplane in the Nepalese capital. There, the skull was held in the hands of the Nepali king, the Indian ambassador, who is the former Political Officer of Sikkim, Mr. Harishar Dayal, and their wives and they looked at and inspected it. That is the news.[24]

Unlike the way he appears in the pages of the HT, Tenzin Norgay is mentioned here before Hillary, and appears to be the main agent in giving the scalp to the king. Apart from this, this article enables us to compare some of the terminology related to the snowman: here, the term yeti is used next to "*gangs mi*." The Tibetan terms used in both articles are thus, in the first case, "*gangs kyi mi*" (i.e. literally corresponding to the English word "snow man") and in the second case, a transcription into Tibetan of the Nepali word "i ti" (in English yeti). The Tibetan term often said to be the Tibetan correspondent of yeti, "*mi rgod*" (wild man), is never used.

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phebs kyi yod 'dug_/gangs mi yod med rung bod kyi gangs ri mtho por gangs seng dkar mo yod pa'i gtam brgyud ni yod do//."

23 *Jo mo glang ma* is the Tibetan term for Mount Everest.

24 Melong 27-3-supplement 1&2: "*ye ti zhes pa'am gangs mi'i thod pa:-_sngon spyi lo 1954 nang 'dzam gling nang gi gangs ri mtho shos jo mo glang mo zhes pa'i rtser 'dzegs mkhan shar pa sku zhabs bstan 'dzin dang sku zhabs he li ri deng /_sar he li ri mtshan du brjod pa mchog nye sngon bal yul brgyud gangs ri'i khrod du sems can i Ti zhes pa zhig yod tshod 'dug pa de bzhin gsar 'tshol du phebs 'dug kyang de lta bu'i sems can ni brnyed mi 'dug kyang /_dgon zhig gi nang i Ti ka pa li yin zhes pa zhig gzigs 'dug pa de bzhin deng skabs kyi shes rig gis nyams chod pa'i ched du dgon pa de nas snga g.yar zhus te a mi ri ka dang in ji pha ran se ljongs su yod pa'i mkhas pa rnams kyis nyams zhib gnang rgyu bcas gnam gru'i thog gtong thabs bcas bal yul rgyal gsar 'byor 'dug cing ka pa li de gor rgyal dang rgya gar gzhung gi sku tshab sngon du 'bras spyi gnang ba dpal ldan mi rje ha ri shwar dA yal lha lcam lhan rgyas mchog gis kyang phyag tu bsnams te gzigs zhib gnang 'dug pa'i gnas tshul//.*"

Quantitatively, the *Melong* shows considerable disinterest in the yeti. As important as the thrill of the yeti was for many Western agents, many actors of the Himalayan locality did not care much about taking their legends further. The *Melong* addressed an audience which its editor saw as an independent nation, especially during the years following India's independence and Tibet's struggle to hold its ground against Chinese dominion. Rather than indulging in the truth of the yeti's existence, for the *Melong*, the yeti complex was a welcome occasion to intensify an image of Tibet as a bounded entity. In the first case, Tibetan explanations for the yeti are offered, in the second case, the national hero Tenzin Norgay is put center stage. Whether and how the yeti might or might not "exist" in the mountains is of very little interest to the nationalist editor of the *Melong*.

Conclusions

In this article we have examined a wide range of sources of many different types including some rare material that has received little attention thus far. We have put these sources in dialogue with each other in order to reveal the ways in which they mutually resonate, and to shed light on the web of interconnections that constitutes what we call the yeti complex. This complex is characterized by multiple narratives, which overlap, and explain and interpret each other.

An integral part of local folklore since time immemorial, the yeti appeared in Western sources in zoological or naturalistic commentaries written by imperial observers, scientists, and military men during the first half of the nineteenth century. Part of the imperial endeavor was, after all, the taxonomic description of the new colonial domain in all its aspects (flora, fauna, minerals, the landscape, human beings). To know is in fact symbolically a prelude to and a requirement for control: hence the importance of mapping the land and acknowledging what lay therein. A mysterious wild being was therefore also perceived as a possible threat: in the imperial epistemology, there is no room for a blank space. Because of this, the yeti had to be assessed, decoded, and naturalized: hominoid or primate, monkey or bear, its place in the system had to be clarified. As a result, the first reports are, in their essence, strictly zoological. We may consider these the set of "scientific" narratives about a mysterious being believed to inhabit the high Himalayas and its forests.

Folk beliefs, tales, and other local, predominantly orally transmitted beliefs about the yeti, and a host of other entities thought to live on land they shared with human communities, are the background—or, one might say, the underpinnings—of the scientific narratives. For the villagers, creatures of folklore like the yeti were never discussed as such: some people claimed to have met them, and they lived on in stories and tales. The villagers did not necessarily consider the yeti and yeti-like creatures to be animals. Instead, they belonged to those entities, variously named, that had

to be taken into account when traveling or hunting, when sacrificing or performing rituals. Through their relationships with these beings, illness and health, misfortune and good fortune, infertility and fertility could be averted or granted, inflicted or negotiated. This set of narratives and the set of scientific narratives were never really integrated into a common discourse. Although many of the explorers and officers who produced scientific narratives included in their reports at least some hints of the supernatural explanations offered by their coolies, workers, and porters, they did not consider these to be more than the chatter of the superstitious, colonized folk.

Such an approach started to change in the twentieth century, when a new generation of social scientists, anthropologists among them, started to look into cultural discourses and symbolic systems. Papers written by Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Siiger make good use of folkloric materials to shed light on the exaggerated, at times misguided scientific craze for finding a new animal species in the Himalayas. Nonetheless, this scientific craze continued through the 1950s and 1960s, in part as a result of renewed interest in the Himalayas after the 1953 Hillary-Norgay expedition. In particular, a growing, Western-oriented mass media energetically pumped up the story of the yeti by sending expeditions to the Himalayas to search for it and then reporting extensively on what ensued. The local Kalimpongian media picked up on this trend to varying degrees, depending on their particular target audiences.

A creature of folklore or a mythological being, a creepy hominoid stalking the mountaineers, a bogeyman to frighten children when they misbehave, the missing link between human and non-human animals, a journalistic scoop, the yeti has been represented in newspapers, books, films, and comics, on stamps and paintings, reported upon in villages and metropolises, whispered about in mountains and talked over in conferences. As Oppitz pointed out: “The Yeti is alive, but one will never see him. One can feel him, but one will never grasp him.” (Oppitz 1968, 141, original in German). This multiplicity of perspectives—none of which can claim to be definitive—underscores once again the being’s proverbial elusiveness. The yeti emerges from the mists of rumors and thrives at the intersections between diverse discourses about its true nature. In this sense, we could say, the contemporary yeti complex is a transcultural product, created by the blurring of boundaries between different ontological realms (natural/supernatural), languages, geographical and empirical dimensions, histories and perceptions.

Online Databases

HT *Himalayan Times*, Kalimpong: Suresh Candra Jain, 1947–1963 [Gaps], Electronic reproduction, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Libraries, http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times, accessed November 15, 2015.

Melong *Yul phyogs so soʾi gsarʾgyur me long,* Kalimpong: Gergan Tharchin, 1925–1963[Gaps], electronic reproduction. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Libraries, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_6981643_000/index.html, accessed November 15 2015.

Articles studied in the HT

Date	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)	Comment
April 29, 1951	5	Dalai Lama Meets People on Mountain Walks		
February 3, 1952	2,6,9	"Abominable Snowman"	René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz	
February 3, 1952	7,9	"Snowman" Monster Wandering in Himalayas? Tibetan Warns Everest Explorers		
December 13, 1953	3	"Abominable Snowman"		also in *Melong*
December 25, 1955	3	Abominable Snowman in the Alps too?	Geneva	
August 26, 1956	5	Our London Letter	B.B. Roy Choudhuri, London	
January 6, 1957	8,10	The Sherpa—The Greatest 'Little Man' in the World	Showell Styles	
May 12, 1957	5	London Newsletter	B.B. Ray Chaudhuri, London	
June 9, 1957	11	New Rules for Yeti Expeditions: Bitter Criticism of Nepal Premier	Kathmandu	
September 29, 1957	6,7	The Story of a Village	"Moosa"	

Date	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)	Comment
February 8, 1959	6-8	The Yeti: Man or Animal	Brijesh K. Verma	
February 15, 1959	6,7	The Yeti: Man or Animal II	Brijesh K. Verma	
August 2, 1959	1	Search for the Yeti	Kathmandu	
September 27, 1959	7	Fresh Efforts to find Yeti. Plan to Attempt Everest Dropped	Darjeeling	
October 25, 1959	5	Genetic Experts at Gangtok	Gangtok	
July 10, 1960	2	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
August 15, 1960	8	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
August 21, 1960	9	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
October 16, 1960	2	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
November 13, 1960	5	London News Letter	B.B. Ray Chaudhari, London	
December 11, 1960	4	Hillary Shows Yeti Scalp to King	Kathmandu	also in *Melong*
October 15, 1961	5,6,8	Darjeeling and its Surroundings	Dr. S.C. Chatterjee	
April 8, 1962	5-7	My Journey to Bhutan	Dr. S.C. Chatterjee	

Articles studied in the Melong

Date and Issue ("volume-number")	Page	Headline	Source (author and/or place)
Jan 1954 (issue 21-10)	3	The Snowman *(gangs kyi mi)*	not specified
Nov/Dec 1960 (issue 27-3)	supplement 1,2	The Scalp of the "Yeti" or "Snowman" *(ye ti zhes pa'am gangs mi'i thod pa)*	not specified

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